

# **Agenda Transcript for the September 2011 Public Meeting of the United States Advisory Commission on Public Diplomacy**

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The U.S. Advisory Commission on Public Diplomacy will hold a public meeting from 10:00am to 11:00am on September 15, 2011, in the Loy Henderson conference room of the State Department's Harry S Truman building at 2201 C Street, N.W., Washington, DC.

The meeting included the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs. The Commission welcomed Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Educational and Cultural Affairs Adam Ereli to brief the Commission, and the public, on the activities and direction of ECA.

This event was webcast live and the online audience were able to pose questions to the Amb. Ereli. A link to the webcast will be available at <http://state.gov/pdcommission>.

## **Commission Members present:**

Mr. Bill Hybl, Chairman  
Amb. Penne Peacock

## **Staff Members present:**

Mr. Matt Armstrong, Executive Director  
LtCol. Cliff Gilmore, Senior Military Advisor to the Commission

## **Presenting at the Meeting:**

Amb. Adam Ereli, Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of State

## **Meeting Agenda:**

10:00 Welcome by Chairman Hybl  
10:10 Comments by Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Adam Ereli, the Acting Assistant Secretary of State for the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs  
10:30 Question & Answer period, led by Commission followed by audience  
10:55 Closing comments & Adjourn

*The Commission would like to thank Brittaney Miller and Irina Karmanova of the Commission and April Gascon of IIP for their assistance during the event.*

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*Due to technical and logistical challenges, transcription began after the meeting start. The recorded webcast also began after the meeting start.*

CHAIRMAN WILLIAM J. HYBL: (In progress) – we look forward to taking a question from the online audience – maybe even two, as well as the audience here in the room.

Today's public meeting will be for one hour, so let's get started, and let me introduce Ambassador Adam Ereli, Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for [Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs](#). Adam assumed the authority of the assistant secretary of educational and cultural affairs on July 26<sup>th</sup> of this year. As principal deputy assistant secretary, Ambassador Ereli manages programs that comprise a budget of \$635 million and a staff of over 400.

Ambassador Ereli has worked extensively as a diplomat abroad and at senior levels in the Department of State in Washington, including the U.S. Ambassador to Bahrain from 2007 to 2011. Ambassador Ereli.

AMBASSADOR ADAM ERELI: Thank you, Chairman.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And thank you for having this hearing. We really are – and I speak on behalf of the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs – thrilled to be here with you and that you are doing this. I am a long-time admirer of the work of the Advisory Commission on Public Diplomacy. You do great work and perform a very valuable public service.

And I also want to thank you for devoting a whole session to the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs. I, you know obviously think it's a worthwhile subject, but I say that not just because of my current position, but I say that based on 22 years of working as a public diplomacy foreign service officer. And during that career, I've been able to see almost all aspects of public diplomacy as a public affairs and cultural affairs officers in the field, in Washington as deputy spokesman in the Bureau of Public Affairs and senior advisor to the undersecretary for public affairs and public diplomacy, and as a chief of mission directing an embassy country team.

Based on this experience, my message for you today is simple; that public diplomacy is essential to advancing American interests overseas and strengthening our national security both at home and abroad, and that the people-to-people exchanges that ECA is charged with carrying out are the heart of public diplomacy. This is because they reach and influence people and governments around the world in transformative and lasting ways. Through the 50,000 people from over 170 countries who take part in our programs each year, we create a foundation of trust with other peoples, we establish relationships that endure independent of political movements or specific regimes. We engage unofficial figures of influence who often cannot be reached by traditional embassy events. We demonstrate values that counter popular misconceptions of Americans, and we increase the capacity of Americans to understand and engage globally.

Today I wanted to talk to you all about – or in more detail about how we accomplish this work on behalf of the American people, what are our priorities as a bureau, and further to your point about adaptive change, how we are preparing for the future. And then after that presentation I look forward to having a discussion with all of you about these issues.

Let me begin with an overview of our policy framework and what we are doing to implement it. The point of departure is the secretary's [Quadrennial Diplomacy and Development Review](#), which notes that public diplomacy has become an essential element of effective diplomacy.

Our other guiding document is the [Strategic Framework for Public Diplomacy](#), which was, I believe, the subject of a previous advisory commission hearing. The framework, quite simply, calls on us to expand and strengthen people-to-people relationships.

We are doing that in a number of ways. First, we are broadening the demographic base of the people with whom we engage, focusing on youth, women and the underserved. We are using, to do that creatively, our academic exchange programs such as Fulbright, our professional exchanges such as the [International Visitor Leadership Program](#), youth exchanges and cultural programs that range from the arts-based to sport – a lot of new and innovative programs in this bailiwick that I'd be happy to talk about in more detail as time permits.

Second, after broadening the demographic base, we are expanding English-language teaching and teacher training as a bridge to foreign publics and a tool for economic empowerment. One ambassador to a key ally remarked to the chiefs of mission at the annual Chiefs of Mission conference this year that English-language teaching is the key to everything we do in this country, from economic empowerment to promoting social cohesion, promoting civic activism, and connecting the people of that country to the United States.

We are expanding the number of regional English language officers, expanding the number of English teaching assistants and devoting considerable attention to the very, very successful Access Microscholarship Program.

The third way we are expanding – strengthening and expanding people-to-people relationships is by deepening the connections between the United States and the alumni of our programs. This is a key priority for us, and for a number of reasons. First of all, there are over a million alumni of ECA programs. That represents a strategic investment that we would do well to leverage.

Recently, we have significantly ramped up our attempt to leverage that investment by creating over 300, or helping to create over 300 alumni associations, by creating, establishing and funding a core of alumni coordinators around the world, and by seeking to stimulate communication and activity among the alumni that furthers the goal of the programs that they were brought to the United States on and contribute positively to their societies in ways that benefit both the United States and their societies.

Let me give you just one example. The president of Chile, along with 350 current and former heads of state and government, is a Fulbright alumnus, along with seven of his cabinet members and the Chilean Ambassador to the United States. Chile recently invested \$7 million in the Fulbright program. This represents a significant host-nation contribution to the Fulbright program and helps to promote our mutual cooperation. But beyond Chile, fully one-third of the Fulbright budget comes from foreign government contributions.

The fourth area in which we are seeking to expand and broaden people-to-people exchanges is in the area of educational advising. Educational advising seeks to provide access to United States higher education for foreign students. This is a key priority for us. Almost

700,000 international students come to the United States each year. According to the Department of Commerce, this is worth \$20 billion annually to the United States economy.

We are working to keep these numbers high with an educational advising network of over 400 centers worldwide that help foreign students come study in the United States, with a network of regional educational advisors that assist those centers, and with support for students who want to come to the United States but don't necessarily have the funds to apply and do all the testing, providing them with some financial support.

This brings me to another aspect of ECA which I think is important but not often talked about, which is the domestic impact of what we do. We often focus on ECA programs overseas, but I think it's important to note that there is a significant domestic component to ECA's activity and its impact.

I just mentioned the significant economic impact of foreign students studying in the United States. We also devote significant attention to helping empower Americans to understand the world better and be more effective citizens in the United States, and to compete in the global marketplace.

One program that we're particularly proud of is the Gilman Scholarship Program, which provides awards to financially disadvantaged U.S. students from underserved sectors to study abroad. Fully two-thirds of these students are the first members of their family to go to college. There are about 2,300 a year who participate in these programs, and we feel that this is a very impactful program in the United States.

The IVLP program, the International Visitor Leadership Program, injects over \$60 million into the United States through the airline and hospitality industry, and it has spawned a network of over 80,000 citizen diplomats to the National Council of International Visitors, who help organize and welcome the international visitors who come to the United States on our programs and provide them a view in understanding the United States that we, as professionals, couldn't possibly do because we're paid to do it. They do it by volunteering. And the visitors see it on the ground in our communities.

Let me now turn to the future and discuss a little bit where we're going and what our agenda is moving forward. There are several factors, sort of looking ahead in the year to come, that we are mindful of in ECA's work and that we are seeking to integrate into our planning.

First of all is the question of – again, which you mentioned in your opening remarks – the question of policy relevance. We always have at the forefront of our mind, how is this program relevant to U.S. policy interests? How is it serving the American people? How is it serving our national priorities? I would note that of critical importance here is the role that the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs plays in America's strategic dialogues with key partners such as China, India, Brazil, Russia and Indonesia.

Second, the question of sustainability. Are we using our funding in a way that is sustainable, in a way that makes the best use of our resources, looking at the unit costs of programs and also looking at what I call the tail of our programs? Is there an impact of the programs beyond the time the visitor spends in the United States and on to when they are in their country? In this respect, you can see how supporting alumni networks and engendering activity by alumni in furtherance of the program objectives is so critical.

Finally, another charge from the strategic framework, in addition to expanding people-to-people relationships, was to deploy resources in line with current priority. That, I think, again, looking forward, is a key issue for us. We call it, in the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, as well as in the Undersecretary of Public Diplomacy, strategic budgeting. And quite simply, it is making sure that our resources are aligned with our foreign policy priorities. The other reason it's really important is because it is a reflection of – you need to do this given the current fiscal reality in this country.

And I wanted to conclude with a discussion of one of the recent actions we've taken to ensure that our budget is strategic and that it is focused on policy priorities, and that it does reflect the input of not just ECA but our posts in the field and the regional bureaus that have responsibility for carrying out our policies in the various regions.

This past spring, we sent to public affairs sections around the world a questionnaire that was designed to elicit feedback on how our programming funds are and should be spent. This questionnaire and the data we received back, we call the ECA programs and budget tool. It's the first time we've ever done this, and we found it to be particularly interesting and useful and impactful.

It was intended to give us a clearer education of how well our programs matched field priorities, with an eye to informing our budget decisions in a very challenging budget environment. We received a response rate of 99 percent. One hundred and seventy seven posts responded to the budget tool. And I will tell you that this wasn't just, you know, a one-page questionnaire, but it involved a lot of work and required a lot of thought, both in terms of plugging in numbers as well as providing narrative feedback.

What emerged was surprising in its consistency. We found out that there is a high demand for ECA programs as the heart of public diplomacy operations in the field, and that the posts consider these programs vital to achieving their strategic objectives. The results did not indicate a single ECA program or program area that could be deemed universally less valuable. But they did point out issues for discussion. Some of the top-line findings to share with you:

First, our posts want more funding for English teaching and teacher training, youth exchanges, alumni engagement, culture and sports, while at the same time keeping core programs such as Fulbright and the International Leadership Visitor Program strong. Across all regions, increases in English language fellows, Fulbright English teaching assistants, study of the United States, sports and cultural programs, and [English Access Microscholarships](#), which bring English-language and American cultural curricula to disadvantaged youth, were routinely requested.

Fulbright and other academic exchanges are critical programs and also universally supported. Several posts indicated a need for more undergraduate or Master's programs rather than Ph.D., and we will look at making these adjustments on a region-by-region and country-by-country basis.

The data also shows that posts are struggling with increasing youth engagement and English teaching with stagnant budgets. Finally, many posts requested more consistent cultural offerings so they can plan ahead and integrate these cultural offerings more effectively into their strategic – the mission of the strategic plan. We've already begun taking steps that combine

cultural program offerings and make them more accessible and easy to plan for, and we're going to be working with the regional bureaus on offering – on expanding our offerings in this area.

You know, the good news is everybody wants more. The bad news is there's not that much more to go around, which brings us to the issue of strategic budgeting. How do we make decisions about where to spend our money based on demand for our programs and supply of funding? What the budget tool tells us, as we look ahead to our budget planning exercise for fiscal year '12, which is in process, and fiscal year 2013, is that it reinforces the importance of consulting with the field and the regional bureaus to make program choices based on policy priorities.

Let me just make a final word about complementarity. Because we often talked about the ECE budget, which is, you know, its own appropriation – but we couldn't do our work overseas just with the ECE budget alone because that pays for the programs. But the people come from the diplomatic and consular program budget in the [Office of the Under Secretary \[of Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs\]](#).

It accounts, for example, for among other things – not exclusively, but from among other things – all American foreign service officers and locally engaged staff for public affairs sections, who are the very people who recruit for our programs and maintain the contacts with alumni to utilize these resources.

So as we talk about broadening and expanding people-to-people exchanges and doing innovative programs and reaching new audiences, the people at the posts are the ones that make those things happen. And the funding for those people comes from D&CP, not ECE, so cutting one – restricting one and not the other defeats both. And I just think it's important to keep that in mind as we think about how educational and cultural programs are funded and conducted overseas and their critical relevance to our national interests at home. So I think I'll just leave it there, sir, and I'm happy to have a discussion.

WILLIAM J. HYBL: Thank you, Ambassador Ereli. Ambassador Peacock?

PENNE PEACOCK: Yes, thank you, Ambassador Ereli. I think that we are certainly, on this commission, the first cousin to your department. We spend a lot of time looking at the same things and trying to figure out where we can be most effective. One thing I would like to ask you – because, as a former ambassador, both of us actually – the Fulbright program, I think, is fabulous, and you have a huge budget for them. What exactly is the expectation of the scholars once they go back to their country?

AMB. ERELI: Great question. Wide open, frankly. I think it's important when we talk about the Fulbright program – I think people normally think of the Fulbright program as scholars and students either coming to the United States or going overseas. That is, obviously, the core of the program, but the Fulbright program, I like to tell people, is a lot more than that. It has become – it is, like other ECA programs, innovative and cutting-edge.

For example, the English teaching assistants that we send overseas to help teach English and engage with young people are through the Fulbright program. We have other parts of the Fulbright program that aren't necessarily degree-granting – the summer institutes, which bring people over for summer study and can also have an incredible impact, and that can be done

quicker and targeted on more specific policy issues, such as pluralism in the United States or federalism. They are another important part of the Fulbright program.

But to your question: Obviously, it gets to the tail issue. How do we assure lasting impact of our programs? We do it with the Fulbright program like we do with other programs – first of all, by trying to establish alumni associations and ensuring that the Fulbright scholars stay in touch with each other and the colleagues we met.

And I would note for you, on that score, that we do a pretty thorough job of assessing impact through our evaluation unit, through surveys of program participants. And their surveys show us that a significant number stay in contact over a period of 10 to 20 years.

The third way, or the third example of something that I'd mentioned and that I think is really worth highlighting, is the NEXUS initiative in Latin America. This came out of – again, it shows how we're using the scholar program in an innovative way to support a policy objective and to develop complementarity between Fulbright and other programs.

But after the Summit of the Americas, we were charged with – by the president and the White House – established a priority of supporting and engaging social development and infrastructure development in Latin America. And so we created the NEXUS scholarship program, which is a region-wide program for scholars to come to the United States to do research on innovative technology or innovative projects in the area of climate change, community development, infrastructure development.

And we are combining that – they come for – they work together in Latin America, then they come here at specific research institutes, do a project, work on lab-to-market – lab-to-market aspects of their research – then go back, engage with the private sector and government in their countries to carry out their project.

So that there's built into the program, not just what I would call dry academic research, which is OK, good, but practical applicable technology for social benefit. And that to me is a good example of how we are working to ensure that there is a lasting, tangible, positive impact of these programs in the host country in ways that benefit both them and the United States.

MS. PEACOCK: And ongoing.

MR. : And ongoing, exactly.

MS. PEACOCK (?): Thank you.

MR. : (Inaudible.)

MS. PEACOCK (?): No, that's OK.

MR. HYBL: We'd like to open up to the audience, questions. We would ask that you use a microphone, and they're around the room in a variety of places, but that you also identify yourself and, if applicable, your organization.

Questions?

My gosh. (Laughter.)

Yes, sir.

Q: I'm Peter Kovatch, I'm a retired public diplomacy foreign service officer who has done two overseas tours this year as a rehired annuitant. One of the things that's confounded me – because I'm a great believer in alumni networking and follow-up – is in both countries, which I will not name, there was a lot of confusion about whether these initiatives and the funding that came from ECA and the mission effort should be just for ECA programs or for exchange programs across the board, which would include AID, IMA (ph), et cetera, et cetera.

I – from the early days of word processing, at least halfway back in my career – I have tried to do this informally even before it had a name, and I always try to do it on a missionwide basis, and I would just like – I think my instinct is that the field needs more direction, and I hope – would hope that direction would be – to be whole-of-government exchange programs present at a mission or in a country. Thank you.

AMB. ERELI: Yeah, I – Peter, I couldn't agree with you more. The fact is our – the fact is, our programs are paid for by the taxpayer, and we owe – the taxpayer doesn't care whether it's, you know, an ECA-run program or a USAID program or a Department of Ed program. They care that the money is being used to the best effect, and I agree with you 100 percent that we gain by focusing not just on ECA alumni but on the alumni of U.S. government-funded programs for foreigners to the United States.

And we are trying to do that more. For example, we have obviously – we have an Office of Alumni Affairs; they are being very aggressive about – in their – or – about reaching out to other agencies at posts, both actually at post and (in ?) the United States, to create alumni associations that reflect not just the ECA alumni but AID alumni or other alumni.

We do this by – we have – we have regional alumni conferences. We invite our other agency colleagues to come to that. We have had some limited success in I guess what I would call hybrid alumni associations. It is – it is a priority for us within the alumni office.

Again, because, does it matter whether somebody went on a Fulbright Scholarship or USAID scholarship or an IMA (ph) scholarship for heaven's sake, if they are going to come back to the – if they come back to their country, positively disposed to the United States, which most of our evaluation literature shows us they are, eager to put that experience to productive use in their host nations and looking for colleagues and other ways to do that? And so the network of alumni or the capabilities of alumni associations and the expertise of all our alumni coordinators should be put at the service of all those people, not just the ones that are – come from ECA programs.

That certainly is a – that certainly is the position of the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs. And you know, it's interesting to hear from you who've been out to post, two posts, about the confusion or lack of clarity on that score from the practitioners in the field. That is something that we will take on board and seek to address.

MR. HYBL: Yes, ma'am.

Q: Hi, my name is Kavita Commer (ph), and I'm at the [Office of the Science and Technology Adviser to the Secretary](#). I'm actually involved in developing an initiative that encourages women from Muslim-majority countries to study in the STEM field – science, technology, engineering and math – at U.S. women's colleges. And so because of that, I'm really interested in this NEXUS initiative that you spoke about that encourages those kinds of things on a regional basis, and I'm wondering if you have any of – more initiatives that also work on regional-base use and if you are looking to expand upon that?

AMB. ERELI: Well, first of all, let me just commend you on your program. We're very aware of it. I think we're working closely with you to operationalize this, and there's another – there's another program that I think is worth mentioning. It's not in the Fulbright realm; it's in our citizen – the realm of citizen exchanges, which is the TechWomen program. I don't know if you're familiar with that. But again, it is in furtherance of – it's in furtherance of the president's – you know, the Cairo speech and the entrepreneurs – subsequent entrepreneurship summit, which focuses on the Muslim world, which focuses on increasing relations in the science and technology field.

And the TechWomen program involves bringing over 35 women for a – I think, six weeks to the United States. These are women that are in middle-level management positions in the technology field, in their countries, both government and the private sector. We bring them here, we team them up with leading innovative technology companies throughout the United States; they spend a month doing an internship, learning leadership skills, learning business practices, learning about, you know, managing people and managing programs. And then the idea is that they go back and are force-multipliers in their country. We are hoping, I think, to expand that to younger audiences, not just sort of the young professionals or midlevel professionals, but even younger in a different way to get to them.

Within our strategic dialogues – Russia, China, Indonesia, Brazil, India – there are – there is a focus on science and technology training, higher education exchanges, community college, development of community – common linkages, which is a – which has proven exceptionally popular in the last couple of years because it is – how should I put it? – practically focused. It is linked to – very directly to economic opportunity for those who are involved. It is shorter term, and it touches on and makes use of a whole segment of the U.S. education system that hadn't been traditionally involved. So in those areas, we are focusing – those are some of the areas where we are focusing on both science, technology, on engaging specific countries, specific regions, specific audiences, and I guess I'd answer the question that way. I don't know if you have a follow-up.

Q: No, thank you.

AMB. ERELI: OK.

MR. HYBL: Thank you.

Yes, sir.

Q: Ambassador Erel and others, I'm Dan Whitman with American University. I'm very excited about the alumni associations that have come up in the last three or four years. I was part of their implementation when I was a foreign service officer. This is intended as a softball question.

I am concerned about something that I call the “country club effect” in which alumni meet with other alumni, and this becomes an internal matter. I do think that there is a great potential – and maybe you thought of this, and I welcome you to comment on this – a potential of those alumni becoming the multiplier effect and go – I – because I believe that a – an alumnus from Ghana has more in common with his own civil society than he does with an alumnus from Japan.

AMB. ERELI: Oh, I couldn’t agree with you more, and in fact – yeah, let me, and this is a good opportunity to clarify the whole alumni program.

I mean, you know, we like to say, the Fulbright program is not your – you know, your grandfather’s Fulbright program anymore. It’s really cutting-edge and innovative. I would say, you know, our alumni associations are not your grandfather’s alumni association. You know, we graduate from colleges, we go to these – you know, we get invitations to reunions. You know, everybody wears the college tie and – (makes repetitive noise). No, these – rather than think of these as alumni associations, you should think of them as citizen active – citizen activist networks that are called alumni associations.

What all do I mean by that? It means that if your – and I’ve seen this – I’ve seen this as a public affairs officer; I’ve seen it as an ambassador – you – let’s take a – let’s take a YES kid for example. A YES kid, for those of you who don’t know, the YES program is the Youth Exchanges – the Kennedy-Lugar Youth Exchange and Study Program, which brings over – it’s been going on for about 10 years now. We’ve got tens of thousands of alumni. It brings over a – about a hundred – a thousand – a thousand high school second – third-year high school students every year. They spend a year in the United States, and then they go back to their home countries.

Most of these kids are – when they get back to their home countries, they come back transformed. They are confident, they feel empowered, they are much more understanding and tolerant of diversity than they used to be. And they see – they see the – they see the – they see what’s possible in a way that they’d never seen before. And so they are charged up and raring to go. But they lack – without an alumni association, they lack a vehicle to channel that energy.

So the alumni association allows them to, A, be with and coordinate with and activate with their – or their – other people from their country who’ve been through the same experience that they have, either as YES kids and they’re – or as IVs (ph) or as Fulbright students and who want to do something, but don’t know where to go or who to turn to or how to do it. So the alumni association – and the alumni coordinator is the person who helps them act on their impulse to be citizen activists and not just to sort of say, oh, wasn’t it a great experience in the United States; let’s get together every week?

And so, you know, some examples of kids who have come back is: There’s a YES alumni from Bangladesh who created community service programs throughout the country for clothing drives and blood donation events and cyclone relief efforts. There’s another woman from Russia who created – went back and created, through the alumni association, a disabled youth movement. And I promise you there are hundreds of examples like this every year from either, again, YES, or Fulbright or IV (ph) or hopefully TechWomen and other agencies who, thanks to these networks, are now doing good things for their country that benefit the United States.

There are others, for example, that are – that have set up civic education networks throughout the – throughout the public schools of the country. There's a gentleman from Morocco that I met that I did that. Well, and it's not the United States teaching civic education. It's Moroccans teaching Moroccans civic education based on one guy getting turned on in the United States. So that's what these alumni networks allow people to do.

You're absolutely right. They're effective only insofar as it is nationals of those – that country putting to use for his fellow – his or her fellow citizens what they use – what they – what they have found in the United States.

You know, the other thing that the – the other part of the alumni network that I think is really, really interesting and useful is we've created a sort of – a(n) online community that has about 80,000 people – I mean, that's obviously that's a small drop in the bucket compared to the total number of alumni, and we're working to grow it – an online Facebook community of 80,000 people, as well as a website with all kinds of resources that are available to alumni if they want to get – they've got – we've got access to database that has over, I think, three – access to sources of funding that total over \$3 billion – different foundations, different NGOs – \$3 billion for citizen activism. So that's the kind of empowerment that these alumni networks represent and, oh, by the way, guess what? It's at a miniscule cost. All this alumni stuff that we're talking about represents less than 1 percent of the ECA budget. So the return on investment of alumni networks is phenomenal.

There's your softball. (Laughter.)

Q: Thank you.

MR. HYBL: Yes.

Q: Yes, I'm Cynthia Schneider; I teach diplomacy and culture at Georgetown University and was formerly the ambassador to the Netherlands under President Clinton. And I have a question on another subject, and please forgive me if you've already answered this. It was long and hard to get in, but I have a question about cultural exchange or cultural outgoing programs, the push-pull of that.

I recently was lucky enough to be in a fantastic program, which I really think was like best practice in cultural diplomacy. It was a – participation of an American gospel group in a(n) international Sufi festival held in Cairo, done with the embassy and a private group called ShareTheMic, who found the perfect group for the request from the Egyptians. So I have a question about that kind of approach, which the embassy in Cairo did very well on this, is going to do more of, compared to what actually happened while we were there discussing a potential future event involving an international hip-hop concert and forum. And then came the word that XYZ group was being sent from Washington and would they like to have it which, of course, you would because you want to do programs.

But I'm wondering what – and I've recently heard of an outsourcing grant to a very experienced music group to handle more of the musical exchanges. So I'm wondering what – what's the approach and the philosophy and from – compared from – here we are in Washington, we think we'll send this group around –

MR. ERELI (?): Right, right.

Q: – compared to requests from posts and, if you wouldn't mind awfully, I'd love to know what the actual budget for culture outgoing programs are. I'm sorry if you already gave it. Thank you.

AMB. ERELI: Yeah, I'll probably be able to find that for you in a second. But – I did mention it, but it gives me a chance to sort of expand on it some more.

I – well, the total budget for – and I don't have the breakdown for culture just by itself, but the total budget for professional, cultural and youth exchange for 2011 was about \$10 million. So it's not a lot of money, frankly.

But, you know, and when I was talking about the budget tool, which was our survey from posts, we got – we got overwhelming feedback that cultural programs, like the hip-hop, like, you know, engaging – or like the hip-hop are incredibly important, and not because they're just "feel-good" events or not because they give the ambassador a chance to invite his diplomatic cronies to the residence for an evening concert. But because they help – they are – they are wedges that allow us to access strategically important audiences and influence them in strategically important ways.

Your example of the Sufis in Cairo is great. I'll give you another example. And this is from my time as ambassador in Bahrain. We had an absolutely amazing guy named Kareem Salama, I think his name was. He was the son – he was born in Egypt, but he came to the United States as a really young kid with his parents, who were there on a Fulbright – (laughter) – in Texas.

So this kid came, two years old, with his parents to Texas. They – he got an engineering degree – oil engineering degree. Then he went to go work in Oklahoma – his father went to work for Oklahoma.

So this is a kid who is about 25, 26 who grew up in Oklahoma, speaking perfectly bilingual Arabic and English, as a Muslim; studied engineering at Michigan, I believe, but always was interested in music – and country music. So he – and poetry, that's right, poetry – both classical Arabic – classical Arabic poetry, country music. (Laughter.) So he comes to the ECA, he sends this kit out with his band – and oh, by the way, the quality of the band was really good because one of the guys played with Beyoncé, OK, so these weren't just jokers – (laughter) – sends them out to the Middle East where he sings his country music to kids in the Middle East.

And a lot of his songs are Quranic scripture put to verse or poems – country poems in – or poems in Arabic and country music – or country music songs in Arabic. Some of them were English but most of them were in Arabic. And so not just in – we had a concert at the residence for high school kids – 300 high school kids at the residence who come away from that event – so, first of all, there's no other program at the embassy that's reaching that number of high school kids. Number two, getting them to come to the American ambassador's residence – are you kidding?

Number three, they walk away with a perception of the United States as not the enemy of Islam, as not an intolerant society, as not, you know, hating of Muslims, but as a country with Muslims who can express themselves, who are devout and who are – who can be both American

and their own culture. So that's the kind of targeted cultural program that in the budget tool the post want more of. And they want it more regularly – and this gets to your whole question about, you know, process and funding and pipeline and all that kind of stuff which is – which is complicated.

And when you talk with the commissioner about adaptive change, this is where I think we really need to take a hard look at how we administer our programs so that we can be more user friendly; so that we can be fast – be more responsive in a faster way to what the field, the regions and the posts identify are their policy priorities, and write and compete grants quickly in order to bring the right kind of groups and the right kind of presentations in a timely way to respond to those requests.

Right now the whole grant process is – as you, I'm sure, all know – pretty cumbersome. And that's just because it's, well, you know, it is what it is, but it's not unique to ECA. But we are looking at how we can – I don't want to say streamline, but modernize and adapt and – our grant solicitation and decision-making process so that, as you say, we can make sure that the – that the best organizations are providing the best representation of what America is about so that the posts in the field can use them in the most effective way to advance their policy priorities.

CHAIRMAN HYBL: Thank you. Why don't we pause for an online question? Matt?

MATT ARMSTRONG: There are several. Here's the first, but I think we just have time for the one, but the first question is: Why does it seem that the Fulbright program is about teaching foreign students about modern technological innovations and not so much about cultural exchanges? As a university student I see Fulbright scholars daily, but they do not interact with the student body too much.

AMB. ERELI: Yeah. When we're – when we're – that's interesting. Where is – does it say where he's from – or she?

MR. ARMSTRONG: Maybe he will during your answer. (Laughter.)

AMB. ERELI: Yeah. Well, let me put it this way. Number one, obviously Fulbright students, and when – we should be specific about this, we bring over master's – people for master's degrees; we don't bring people over for undergraduate degrees. So we're talking about master's students – two-year master programs – some Ph.D.s but mostly the great – the vast majority are master's programs. They cover all fields, they're not just scientific fields; they are not just technical fields. They are literature and public policy and public health and, well, it's the whole – the whole gambit.

We work very, very hard to address the issue that your questioner raises which is integration, cross pollination. You know, I'm disappointed to hear that it's not working in – where they are. And it's something, you know, with more clarity we can do something about. But I'll give you an example of how we're doing this. Every year we host Fulbright enrichment seminars in which we – last year we had nine of them – in which we bring Fulbright students in the country – and in our – foreign Fulbright students in the United States – together to meet each other and talk about a subject of – a theme of current interest.

So every year it's a different year. Last year it was greening and the importance of – the importance of green technology and responsible environmental practices. And one of the –

beyond one of the – beyond getting together and bringing them together to look at one of these specific issues and get them out of their institution and a broader experience of the United States – is to impress upon them the importance of interacting with their local community.

You know, I talked about educational advising and the priority that we put on educational advising. There are a number of reasons for that. Number one, I mean, obviously people who come to the United States and study and go back to their country are generally inclined to be more positively disposed to the United States. But number two – and beyond the economic impact – number two, they strengthen our higher education establishment.

Our universities, our colleges are richer places because of the presence of foreigners. It brings diversity to the student body, it brings a perspective to teaching and learning that wouldn't otherwise be there, and their interaction with – their interaction with the rest of the university community is critical to that. So we work very hard to impart that awareness to the students before they leave their host country, when they get here at orientation seminars, during the time they are here through enrichment seminars. Obviously, I guess, we're not at 100-percent fulfillment rate.

MR. ARMSTRONG: By the way, it's Sam Houston University, so Texas.

CHAIRMAN HYBL: Yes, ma'am?

Q: My name is Joanne Schmoll. I'm a performing artist who is interested in doing cultural diplomacy work. And as a follow-up to some of the religious issues – given the fact that in so many cultures around the world, specifically much Muslim countries, the religion has such an incredible impact on their public policy and their government and life in general – how – what types of programs – aside from a country-singing Muslim guy, how – what types of programs are there that will engage the religious communities and the religious leaders in a cultural sense, specifically using the arts or other forms of culture, that we can advance more understanding in that regard but also at the same time reconciling our own First Amendment prohibition on establishing religion?

AMB. ERELI: I think – I mean, this isn't – this really isn't about religion, per se. And I would – I would be keen to – I wouldn't want to leave you with that impression. This is about – you know, it's not whether you're Muslim, Christian, Jew, whatever. This is about, I think, trying to overcome stereotypes, trying to create a basis for understanding, and the creative use of the arts is an effective means to do that. But the creativity is not just on the part of the artist, it's on the part of the – of the practitioner of the post.

You know, I talked about the DNCP (ph) funds and who we pay to conduct these programs. I mean, it's up to the PAO and the people in the field to determine how best to use a cultural presentation to advance their objectives. So it's not necessarily religious-based but it's – you take – you know, I've seen it before – you take – you take a drummer to a remote village who – of people who have never seen America or met an American, and that drummer jamming with locals shows them that we can pick up their rhythm in a way that they had no idea.

So that's not a religious message. That is a – that's a mutual-understanding message. And to the extent that it establishes productive relationships with communities with whom we didn't have productive relationships before and that have an influence in their country, then it becomes a foreign policy win.

CHAIRMAN HYBL: Good. Thank you. One last quick question – they are going to throw us out of the room here in a minute or two.

Q: I'll be quick. Ambassador Erel and commissioners, I'm Brian Carlson. I am with InterMedia and also with the Public Diplomacy Council. Recently in travels and so forth I've had a number of people point out to me that the one part of this that's essential is of course out in the field, the people who are implementing these programs are the foreign service officers in the embassies. And while, you know, Fulbright grants are handled by a commission which is established to do so, a lot of the other types of programs end up falling on the shoulders of the cultural affairs officer or someone else at the embassy to basically make the selection process, ensure that the grants are run properly, all those sort of administrative details that are essential.

And their numbers are few, and increasingly they feel that they are – they're hard-pressed to get it all done at the level that it ought to be done, particularly the involvement of Americans in the selection process, which I think you would agree is one of the most important parts of the whole exchange operation. I just wonder what you all would say about the staffing levels overseas for public diplomacy and particularly the cultural side – the exchanges side. And is there a strategic plan to convince the Congress, the OMB and RM in this building of what levels you need?

AMB. ERELI: Yes, there's a strategic plan out. For example, I'm meeting with staffers of House and Senate committees tomorrow to discuss not necessarily this issue but the whole issue of funding for our programs. It's a huge priority, not just for ECA but for foreign affairs – the foreign affairs budget in general. And I mean – and it's not just – it's just not – it's not just our POs and CAOs and cultural LESSs that are out there in the field carrying out our programs and doing work on behalf of the American people, it's the – you know, it's the AID folks, it's the economic folks, it's the commercial folks, it's the concert folks who are the first line of defense for the homeland.

So I don't want to be too parochial about this. I take your point, and obviously I can speak to the ECA side of it. But from the outset I want to say that this isn't just an ECA issue. This is a – this is a foreign affairs function issue. And we are under the gun. And not ECA but the department has a strategy to go out there and to make our case in the most persuasive way possible. And that, sir, is one of the reasons I thank you for having this hearing. That is what – that is what we are here to do is to explain what we're doing, why it's important and to make our case.

I also take your point that people are at the heart of public diplomacy. (Chuckles.) I mean, that just – I hope it goes without saying. You know, I'll give you – I'll give you an – well, people are at the heart of public diplomacy in two ways: Number one, to conduct programs you have to have the right people – committed, trained in the programs and the language and the local culture, and understanding what our national interest is and what our policy in the country is. So you need people in that respect.

But you also need people on the other side to engage with. You know, if you have Americans that are – that are all those things: They know the language; they know the programs; they know the country; and they know the policy. And they're sitting in an embassy or doing a webchat – no offense to the webcast – and aren't face to face with the person or having the

person in their house or sending the person to the United States to meet Americans – that's the other side of the people equation.

It's people to people. People, one, is our guys; the other people are the other guys. And we have to be face to face with them. We have to engage with them. They have to see us, they have to smell us, they have to hear us, they have to understand us because when they do, we win them over. Now, maybe we do it through websites; maybe we do it through chat rooms. OK, that's all good. But it's not a substitute.

So when we make the case for people, we have to make both those cases. Yes, we need the people to do the job, but we also need the people that have the resources to reach out and touch the others. And – (chuckles) – it's a hard – that's a hard – it's a hard hill to climb given the current state of affairs that we all know so well.

CHAIRMAN HYBL: Thank you, Mr. Ambassador – certainly an informative conversation. It's great that you were here. We're all appreciative. And we want to thank all of you for joining us today. There are a couple hundred of you here that have an interest in public diplomacy and where it's going.

And we want to remind you that we do have a website. And for the last, what, 60 years – since 1949, I guess that'd be 62 years – all of our reports are online if you can't get to sleep at night or if you think of some other reason why you'd be – wanted to go to those particular efforts. We have a Facebook page and we – you come visit us on our Twitter feed.

We want to thank the Bureau of International Information and Programs and the Office of Innovative Engagement who really were our hosts for this webcast. Thanks to Matt Armstrong, Cliff Gilmore, Irina Karmanova and Brittaney Miller for your help and support today, and April Gascon from IIP who also assisted it.

Our next meeting will be in November 28<sup>th</sup> in Los Angeles. Any of you that are on the coast, join us again. And thank you for being here. (Applause.)

(END)



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